



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Jan. 21, 2004

For More Information, Contact:
Karen Oby
Division of Family Health
North Dakota Department of Health
Phone: 701.328.4529
E-mail: koby@state.nd.us

Researchers Estimate Annual Medical Costs of Obesity in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – In North Dakota, obesity-related medical expenditures are estimated at \$209 million each year, according to a paper published today by researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and RTI International. The paper also provides estimates of the obesity-related costs to state Medicaid and Medicare programs.

Published in the journal *Obesity Research*, the paper estimates that annual national medical expenditures resulting from obesity are \$75 billion in 2003 dollars. In North Dakota, obesity-related medical expenditures are estimated at \$209 million annually. Of that, about one-half is paid for by North Dakota's Medicare and Medicaid programs. Studies indicate that about 23.4 percent of North Dakotans are obese.

"These estimates of obesity-attributable medical expenditures illustrate the economic impact of obesity at the state level," said State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D., M.P.H.T.M. "However, the ultimate cost of obesity is measured in chronic disease and early death. We all must take responsibility – both as individuals and by working together – to reduce the health toll associated with obesity."

North Dakota has been proactively addressing obesity through Governor Hoeven's public health initiative, *Healthy North Dakota*, an innovative statewide partnership that focuses on health priorities in the state. *Healthy North Dakota* is comprised of nearly 180 individuals representing more than 70 agencies and organizations from across the state. Specifically, *Healthy North Dakota* is addressing obesity by focusing efforts in the following areas: healthy weight – nutrition; healthy weight – physical activity; worksite wellness; third-party reimbursement; and health disparities.

The complete obesity-expenditure report, entitled "State-Level Estimates of Annual Medical Expenditures Attributable to Obesity," appears in the January 2004 edition of the journal *Obesity Research*, published by the North American Association for the Study of Obesity. Copies of the paper are available at www.obesityresearch.org.

-- more --

The authors of the report caution that the state-level estimates in the paper should not be used to make comparisons between states because of variables unique to each state.

For more information about the report and obesity in North Dakota, contact Karen Oby, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4529. For more information about the *Healthy North Dakota* initiative, contact Melissa Olson, *Healthy North Dakota* coordinator, at 701.328.4908.

-- 30 --